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A TREE-CLIMBING WOODCHUCK

BY HAROLD ST. JOHN

[Plate 15]

In June, 1920, the New England Botanical Club held its annual spring field trip in the upper Connecticut Valley. To Mr. Richard J. Eaton and myself was assigned a territory including Quechee Gulf in eastern Vermont. On the afternoon of the 12th, we had clambered along the base of the cliffs on the north side of this deep gorge, and at the lower end crossed the Ottauquechee River and started up the hillside to the south of the river into the town of Hartland. In the midst of an open pasture I stooped to dig a prostrate plant, and as I rose I saw that Eaton, who had walked ahead towards a clump of trees, had stopped and was beckoning to me. He had scared a woodchuck from the open ground and it had run to the trees and climbed six feet up a tree eight inches in diameter. While it hung there watching us, I drew out my camera and took a snapshot at a distance of thirty feet. Still the woodchuck clung to the tree trunk, so I quietly approached to within six feet and snapped another picture, which is here reproduced. My companion then joined me and finally stepped up and stroked the animal on the back. This was to confirm what we saw, that the animal had fur, not quills on its back, and to make perfectly sure that it was a woodchuck, not a porcupine. We were close enough to see that it was a female. On being stroked, she hitched around to the opposite side of the trunk. After hanging there a minute, she turned, dropped to the ground and scuttled off, disappearing in a thicket.

Whenever I have related this incident, it has met nothing but incredulity. After my long acquaintance with the woodchuck in southern New England, I am afraid that I too would have been inclined to doubt the accuracy of anyone telling me that woodchucks climbed trees. Yet Eaton and I certainly saw the thing done, and I am lucky enough to have a good photograph to substantiate my statement. It seems desirable to put this bit of field observation on record.

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A TREE-CLIMBING WOODCHUCK

Marmota monax preblorum

(St. John: Tree-Climbing Woodchuck.)